



Tuna Industry Pioneers of San Pedro and Terminal Island, California

Nick Danelovich

Retired Tuna Boat Cook in the U.S. West Coast
Tuna Fishery

Interviewed on November 22, 2012



Nick Danelovich was recognized by many in the industry as one of the most respected tuna boat cooks of his era. He spent almost his entire career cooking for Captain Frank Gargas Sr. and his crew, demonstrating the loyalty and tight family-like bond that existed on the tuna boats of that era. With the crew spending so many days away from home, the cook was a reminder of home, cooking their favorite meals to help ease the loneliness they often experienced.

Interview Abstract: Nick was born in Hvar, Croatia, in 1914, and his family moved to Oregon when he was young. He started salmon fishing at a young age in Astoria, and then went with his brothers to fish in Alaska when he was a bit older, and that is where he first became a cook for a fishing crew. He moved to San Pedro, California, at the invitation of a friend and became the cook for many years on a tuna boats owned and operated by Captain Frank Gargas, Sr. Nick describes his schedule as a cook on the tuna boat and recounts the menu he prepared for the crew and Frank's family during a Christmas spent fishing for tuna in the waters off of New Zealand. He talks about making the crew happy by preparing special desserts for birthdays. He reflects on the big differences between San Pedro now and back when he was fishing; when it was a bustling fishing port with tuna vessels lined up at the docks and how he enjoyed the smell of tuna in the morning coming from the waterfront.



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Interview Transcript:

My name is Nick Danelovich. I was born in Hvar in former Yugoslavia (it's Croatia now) in 1914 – February 1914.

I really started when I was a kid in Astoria – salmon fishing. I grew up and went to school and went to Alaska for fishing with my brothers. I started cooking there for the reefer¹ in that season. And then they invited me to come down to California and work on one of their boats. And then after that I went with Frank² on the *St. Helena*³ and it had a nice electric stove and a nice kitchen there. Real nice.

So you get up at 2-3 in the morning and then how long would you be working before you go to sleep again?

Oh I would work and they would go to the set, and I'd then fix them breakfast and then you go to the set early, and then you prepare the next meal and so on. And then in the afternoon you got to knock off for a while, you know.

Christmas time in New Zealand: we had turkey and shortbread and shortcake and the guys from the other boat came over and his⁴ wife was there. We always celebrated and had a good time with the kids, [for] somebody's birthday we would have the cheesecake or baked Alaska.

Well there is a big change in San Pedro. I used to like the smell of tuna in the morning, but I don't smell it anymore. When I came here everything was bustling, you know...there used to be boats lined up five in a row in the harbor. Yes, it's a different world.

Filmed by John Dutton Media.

¹ "Reefer" refers to a cold storage vessel that receives fish from many fishing vessels and transships the fish to shore-based storage and/or processing plants.

² Captain Frank Gargas (see VFF audio clip for more information on Captain Gargas)

³ The *St. Helena* was a purse seine tuna fishing boat owned by Van Camp Seafoods and operated by Captain Frank Gargas.

⁴ Captain Frank Gargas' wife.



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Photos Provided by Frank Gargas, Sr.



Nick began cooking for Captain Frank Gargas Sr and his crew starting aboard the F/V Columbia.



Nick followed Captain Gargas Sr. over to the F/V Santa Helena where he ran the galley.



Nick finished his cooking career onboard the F/V Caribbean owned and operated by Captain Frank Gargas Sr.



Nick cutting a fish for the galley on the deck of the purse seiner.



Nick and a crew member filleting fish for the galley on the deck of the purse seiner.



Nick being interviewed about how his early fishing days and his adventures sailing around the world as a cook aboard a tuna boat for Captain Frank Gargas and crew. 2012. (Photo: Craig Heberer.)



Fishing boats in the San Pedro-Terminal Island area during the bustling time that Nick recalls. He enjoyed smelling tuna in the morning coming from the San Pedro waterfront.